



**A**s the U.S. Coast Guard's installation of radio towers and equipment picked up speed in 2009, Rescue 21, the agency's new distress communications system, now covers the East Coast of the U.S. from Maine to Florida and across the Gulf of Mexico from Florida to Corpus Christi, Texas. The last link on the Atlantic seaboard, the Northern New England sector, went live in November, extending the coverage area to northernmost Maine.

On the West Coast, Rescue 21 now covers the Washington and Oregon coasts to Northern California. The new Group Humboldt Bay includes sectors Walker Ridge, Cape Mendocino, Shelter Cove and Point Arena. Sectors San Francisco and San Diego are scheduled to be ready in April, with Los Angeles/Long Beach due at the end of 2010.

The Great Lakes are next, with Detroit to have Rescue 21 in late 2010 and three other Great Lakes sectors in 2011. (For a deployment map, go to [www.BoatUS.com/mmsi](http://www.BoatUS.com/mmsi)). In North Carolina, there's currently limited coverage in the Outer Banks; full deployment of Sector North Carolina is scheduled for May.

Rescue 21 now covers 32,000 miles of U.S. coastline with final coverage, including Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Guam (2011), Alaska (2017) and Western Rivers (2012), set at 95,000 miles.

As boaters who already have DSC-

enhanced VHF marine radios know, Rescue 21 enables mariners to send encoded mayday calls with a GPS location and the vessel's identification number, among other features. Coast Guard watchstanders can quickly locate a distress call, even from a regular VHF radio, and the system is credited with saving dozens of lives. Such was the case last August when two teenagers sent a mayday from their sinking 21-foot boat 30 miles out in the Gulf of Mexico. Using the direction-finding capability installed two months earlier, the Coast Guard got a fast location and the two were picked up by a helicopter.

The new technology has stronger radio signals, enhanced direction-finding, instant playback of received calls and better communications with other agencies and first responders. It also has several mobile emergency backup systems, one used successfully during Hurricane Katrina. The system also makes hoax mayday calls easier to trace and hopefully eliminate.

A DSC radio that is connected to a GPS sends the boater's actual position automatically with the distress call but for that feature to work the vessel owner must connect the radio to a GPS. Boaters must also register their contact information to receive an official nine-digit MMSI (Maritime Mobile Service Identity) number to program into the radio. BoatU.S. offers free MMSI registration to anyone boating on U.S. waters. For those cruising abroad, the MMSI must be obtained along with

a ship station license from the Federal Communications Commission. For the FCC, call 877-480-3201 and hit option 2, or visit [http://wireless.fcc.gov/services/index.htm?job=licensing&id=ship\\_stations](http://wireless.fcc.gov/services/index.htm?job=licensing&id=ship_stations).

Visit [www.BoatUS.com/mmsi](http://www.BoatUS.com/mmsi). A free DSC radio tutorial by the BoatU.S. Foundation can also be used or downloaded from this site. — E.D.

## Update Your Radio Registration

Now that Rescue 21 is coming into wider use for boaters, it's imperative that DSC-VHF radio owners not only register but update their records in the MMSI database. If you registered with BoatU.S., go into your online account and update any changes in boat name, description, ownership, home phone and address, and any other important contact information that might have changed since you registered.

BoatU.S. initiated the MMSI registration program with the FCC and Coast Guard nearly 10 years ago so that boaters on U.S. waters would not have to pay some \$200 for a radio license just to get an MMSI number. BoatU.S. registrations are fed into the Coast Guard's search-and-rescue database so having the most current information on file is important should an alert be received bearing your MMSI number.